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135 Van service won't roll on time in city

Landfill dispute, county manager vacancy blamed

By Matt Garfield
The Herald

Seniors in Rock Hill have waited months to start using a public van system for rides to the doctor and other appointments. Thanks largely to an ongoing feud over a landfill, they'll have to wait longer.

The service won't start next week as planned because the city and York County have yet to agree on a contract. No one is certain how long the delay will last. But the landfill controversy is being blamed.

It has consumed countless hours at recent meetings and workshops, depriving county officials in York of time to deal with other priorities.

"The oxygen is sucked out of downtown York right now by the landfill," said City Councilman John Gettys, who has pushed the service for the past year. "We're just wasting the opportunity.

People who run for office sign up to do more than that."

The city and county are feuding over whether a construction and debris landfill should be built on Vernsdale Road on the south side of Rock Hill. The dispute touches on complex legal and zoning issues.

"County government has more to do than just landfills," County Councilman Rick Lee said last week. "We've got 800 employees and 208,000 customers in this county that deserve service and planning."

Shirley Boone is one of those customers. The retired convenience store cashier lives at the Courtyard at Highland Park senior apartments east of downtown Rock Hill. When she's feeling well, Boone, 65, has been known to ride her

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motorized wheelchair down East White Street to the Bi-Lo a few blocks away.

"It would help out a whole lot," she said of the service. "I haven't driven in over a year now. I got so I was getting lost. I was scared I was going to hurt somebody or hurt myself. I'd just rather not drive."

Coupled with the absence of a county manager — Al Greene resigned in December — county officials say they are battling to keep up with their duties. Greene handled the bus system.

"We've had many issues come up and are struggling with some of those now," interim manager David Larson said. "I'm at a loss because Al's not here. I don't have a lot of notes to work from."

April 16 vote eyed

Larson said the best-case scenario is for the County Council to vote April 16 on a final agreement with the city, but he added it might

take longer. Rock Hill officials say the county has had since January to take action.

"We're sort of waving in the wind," Gettys said.

After a deal is approved, another week will be needed to get the vans rolling, said Wendy Duda, director of the county's Council on Aging, which would run the program.

The service, known as dial-a-ride, allows passengers to call two days in advance to reserve rides anywhere in the city for one-way fares of \$2.50. It's open to anyone,

but seniors are viewed as the target audience because they often don't have access to cars.

Since April 2006, the service has been available only to residents living in the rural parts of the county. It would expand into the city as soon as an agreement is reached.

"I don't want the fact that I'm busy to be the reason things can't move forward," Larson said. "I don't think that's acceptable."

Matt Garfield • 329-4063
mgarfield@heraldonline.com